DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 045 625 TE 001 997

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TITLE Non-Graded English and Articulation in Literature.
INSTITUTION California Association of Teachers of English, Redlands.
PUB DATE 67
NOTE 4p.
JOURNAL CIT California English Journal; v3 n2 p64-7 Spr 1967

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.30
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Education, College Bound Students, Composition (Literary), English Curriculum, *English Programs, Language, *Learning Experience, Learning Motivation, *Literature, Noncollege Preparatory Students, Relevance (Education), Remedial Instruction, Secondary Education, Student Characteristics, *Student Needs, Textual Criticism

ABSTRACT

After the needs of secondary students were assessed realistically, an English program was designed at Katella High School, Anaheim, California, to provide all students with more challenging, in-depth learning experiences and to equip college-bound students with the kinds of capabilities they will need in college. The program disregards traditional ability and grade level grouping practices and places students in remedial reading and composition courses according to skill proficiency. For all students not requiring remedial work, a growing number of academic courses is offered in American literature, advanced composition, dramatic literature, poetry, mythology, folklore, language study, and narrative fiction. Each course has a specific focus. In literature, for example, rather than surveying authors and works, the text of each work chosen for study is carefully examined. Some of the immediately apparent advantages of this plan are that students claim to be more enthusiastic about English; 10th and 11th graders are academically stimulated by taking classes together; teachers and students can study in depth; and assignments in literature, language, and composition become meaningful preparation for college. (JB)

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California English Journal,
Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 1967.

ED045625

MANY HIGH SCHOOLS are experimenting with English programs and scheduling. Mr. Myers, Chairman of the Department, describes here a solid and logical organization that seems to be producing results.

Non-Graded English and Articulation in Literature

FRED MYERS, *Katella High School, Anaheim*

I will attempt to confine my remarks to the instructional factors in our high school program which apply most directly to the movement of our students to the colleges. First, however, I should describe briefly our program at Katella. The design of our instructional program is predicated upon certain theories about how students learn, and upon a few heretical assumptions concerning traditional approaches.

First, we have observed certain traits about secondary students: They tend to be lazy in their studies, they tend to jump to conclusions, they tend to be more concerned about receiving a grade rather than an education, and they tend to get bored easily (or at least they act bored when they feel insecure).

Second, we feel that students learn more effectively and consequently more successfully from disciplined involvement with the material of a course than from being told what is in the material. It follows that the teen-ager requires a greater degree (or sometimes a different kind) of motivation in order to keep his interest stimulated. Also, we find that the college preparatory student, so identified, worries less about getting involved in the learning experience than he does about doing "what's required" to earn that college recommended grade.

Third, we take issue with two relatively sacred traditional concepts in the education of students in English. One is that there is validity in the complex logic that has produced a 10th grade English, 11th grade English, and 12th grade English. The experiences of our Katella English teachers lead us to believe that this system of grade level courses in senior high school simply does not jibe with the way students learn and in effect produces more bad results than good. It is just not true that the 10th grade student is necessarily more immature and less capable than the 11th or 12th grade student. So, our program ignores grade level grouping, and every course at Katella has both 10th and 11th grade students in it.

The second traditional concept which we have more or less ignored is the concept of homogeneous grouping by that mysterious "ability" factor. We do group our students for remedial work in reading and composition skills, but the determining factor is the level of achievement

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and proficiency rather than some native ability (which is sometimes quite different and terribly hard to define accurately). While we would agree that students do differ in their capacity to learn, we feel that grouping them accordingly produces some very undesirable results. First, the history of the non-college preparatory course indicates that more often than not the student assumes a prejorative connotation to his classification and responds accordingly; he tends to give up or he quits trying to learn because he feels he has been told he can't learn.

On the other hand, the student designated "college preparatory" tends to assume that he "has it made," and that all he needs to do is make the grade. Actually, my experience in the last ten years has shown me that a suprising number of our non-college preparatory students graduate from high school and proceed to make liars out of every English teacher and counselor they ever had.

Of course, I have generalized here and perhaps drawn a picture with strokes too broad. However, these are the considerations which we used in designing a program for our school. By ignoring these established traditions, we have been freed to develop a program which we feel will provide our students with a kind of background in English that will better prepare the "terminal student" for his future and at the same time prepare the college bound student for a more successful college career.

Our program then is this: After testing, the first step is the placement of students in remedial courses regardless of their potential *if* their testing indicates that they have a handicapping weakness in the essential skills of reading or composition.

Students not placed in remedial sections may choose the courses they wish to take from a variety of offerings, all of which are academic in content and demanding in their execution. The courses are all semester courses in which an "A" or a "B" grade is a college recommended grade. The courses we currently offer of this type are American Literature, Composition II, Dramatic Literature, Poetry, and Mythology and Folklore.

Next semester we will vary our offerings slightly and include a course in Language Study and perhaps a course in Narrative Fiction.

Next year as the student body grows and we have more teachers we will include courses in British Literature, World Literature, Composition III, Comparative Literature, the Modern Novel, and perhaps courses in Shakespeare, The Great Books, and The Humanities. As we determine our needs, or rather the students' needs, we are free to institute courses which will challenge—remedial, average, or bright. We have already made some very rewarding discoveries with our program:

1. The students tell us that they are more interested and enthusiastic about English than they have ever been before.

2. We find that rather than causing problems by having a 10th and 11th grader together in a roughly heterogenious section we have solved some problems. The sophomores accept the challenge of competing with juniors with great zest; and the juniors, stimulated by the competition, have not fallen into that lethargy sometimes typical of the junior year.

3. Because each course has a more specific content than the amorphous English I, II, III, or IV survey, both students and teachers find that we can study in depth; and because we are not pressured to "cover" the prescribed text, the students are receiving a larger background experience in each course.

4. Because of a specific focus of each course in Literature, our work with language study and, more significantly, our work in composition takes on greater meaning.

We are already convinced that the kinds of composition assignments based upon our study of Literature are producing far more meaningful experiences in terms of preparation for college. As teachers, we are aware of the kinds of writing that will be expected of our graduates when they are in college. Therefore, our assignments are based on close study of a literary work which parallel the kind of writing in which students must excel to succeed in college.

In conclusion, we feel our program is aiming at a level of articulation with the college experience that had heretofore been unobtainable. Not only does our course work provide an incentive to "excel," it provides a framework for preparing the student psychologically for the kinds of decisions and responsibilities he will face in college.

Our program design aims at producing "mature" readers through disciplined approach and response. As C. S. Lewis maintained (*An Experiment in Criticism,* Cambridge University Press, 1961.): "Excellence in our response to books, like excellence in other things, cannot be had without experience and discipline."

Our emphasis is on understanding the work through careful disciplined examination of the work. Our best students may cause a few bad moments from some college teachers because they will have been trained to respond to the work, not the critics. But I agree with another comments by Lewis:

> **Everyone who sees the work of honor students in English at a university has noticed with distress their increasing tendency to see books wholly through the spectacles of other books. On every play, poem or novel, they produce the view of some eminent critic. . . . Less and less do we**

> **meet their individual response. That all important conjunction (Reader meets text) never seems to have been allowed to occur of itself and develop spontaneously.**

It is our contention at Katella High School that the most valuable articulating function we can serve is to teach the young mind how to respond to a work accurately, logically, and completely.